

CHECKING IN, CHECKING OUT

TRAVELING WITH WINE

by Edward Ragg and Fongyee Walker

Wine lovers often take advantage of summertime to visit favorite regions or some new locale of the ever-expanding wine world. Others might find themselves in a country with lower taxes on wine and a less robust currency. As you dart from one wine shop to another, getting the stuff home becomes a pressing concern.

Unsurprisingly, this is a topic of lively discussion among diehard wine lovers: How much am I allowed to carry? How should it be packed? How do I keep my wines in mint condition (short of not moving them at all)?

If you are returning to the PRC, be prepared to declare your wine if it exceeds two liters (but only if the wine itself exceeds 12 percent alcohol by volume). In other words, if you bring back German Kabinett Riesling or ice wine at 7.5 percent abv, you can haul extra. But the bottles that you're carrying for personal use – how should they be packed?

One useful, inexpensive piece of kit is the “Styrofoam wine shipper.” These are polystyrene covers that can be packed into conventional suitcases. A set of six should

Theft of wine from poorly packed cases is not unheard of

cost between USD 5-10 and come in standard 750ml, magnum or Champagne bottle formats at slightly different prices; they can be picked up at most wineries.

If you don't want bulky styrofoam, “wine sleeves” are handy. These are essentially glorified bubble-wrap and are usually easy to find at wineries in progressive regions used to accommodating visitors keen to transport purchases; Australia, New Zealand and just about anywhere outside Europe should have packaging on hand (Italy is one exception). If you're anticipating returning with a vinous haul, it never hurts to pack bubble-wrap and extra towels in your luggage.

Alternatively, you can splash out on a check-in case specifically to carry wine. The Wine Cruzer™ (www.winecruzer.com) costs a cool USD 300, but comes with a lifetime guarantee and holds eight 750ml bottles. However, watch out for carriers that are merely “wine bags.” These are little better than shopping bags or decorative bottle covers.



The most important thing is to make sure the bottles themselves are padded well – cardboard offers no protection against luggage handlers. Also, the theft of wine from poorly packed cases is not unheard of. Wrap up carefully.

Some final advice: When you get home, don't uncork anything for about four weeks after shipping, particularly with older wines. The esters that give wine its complex flavors are constantly splitting and re-forming in

the bottle. Travel shakes them up, but most knit back together with time. If you've spent a lot on your favorite bottles, including the ticket to get them home, this extra little care – plus proper storage – is essential.

Edward Ragg and Fongyee Walker run Dragon Phoenix Fine Wine Consulting (www.longfengwines.com), Beijing's first independent wine consultancy and write the Dragon Phoenix Wine Blog.

SELECT SIPS

One to quaff
2007 Kleine Zalze Cellar Selection Chenin Blanc, South Africa (RMB 109)

South Africa's wine regions are highly desirable travel destinations – and thankfully, the lot of South African wine is improving in China. This Chenin Blanc is light-green in color with attractive apple and pear fruit, and with a refreshing, high acid palate. Very food-friendly. (Available from Torres China; contact Sophie Sun at sophie@torres.com.cn.)

One to drink
NV Tio Pepe Fino Sherry, Jerez, Spain (RMB 210)

If you want to recreate Spanish tapas, Fino sherry is the ideal partner. Though traditionally hard to find in China,

various Finos are now available here. This classic, made by Gonzales Byass, is intense gold with a characteristic tart and almond, yeasty nose. One of the few wines that matches salty foods. Serve chilled. (Available from Links China; contact Aladin Laroussi at aladin@linkschina.com.cn.)

One to savor
2007 Tatty Bogler Pinot Noir, Central Otago, New Zealand (RMB 527)

Central Otago is a stunning destination made famous by *Lord of the Rings*, but you needn't travel there to enjoy this fantastic Pinot Noir made by Dr John Forrest. Attractive ruby, the nose offers abundant red cherry fruit with perfumed notes and subtle oak. The palate has silky tannins, refreshing acidity and great balance. (Available from ASC, call 400 883 2299.)